

## INTRODUCTION

Melvil Dewey would have been appalled. In 1885, nine years after Dewey and others founded the American Library Association, thereby starting American librarianship's ascent from the dark ages, the North Carolina State Library probably looked more like a glorified attic than an orderly collection of books, pamphlets and newspapers. According to the librarian,

...there is actually no space left which can in any way be utilized. We now have thousands of valuable books on the floors of the room and gallery and in closets constantly exposed. These will be more or less injured if not properly shelved, and of course this state of affairs necessarily hampers the Librarian, to some extent, in the proper discharge of his duties, it often causing much time to be consumed in finding a particular volume in this chaos of literature.<sup>1</sup>

Owing to the crowded condition and crude organization of the library in the east-wing room on the third floor of the State Capitol, patrons probably derived little benefit from the information it contained.

Yet the library represented the commitment of a long series of state leaders to the maintenance of a literary resource capable of meeting the needs of a variety of people. Founded in 1812 as a collection of legal material to assist government officials in their duties, the library gradually evolved into a diverse research collection open to anyone spry enough to climb two flights of stairs.